

Affirmation:
United Methodist
for Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual and
Transgendered
Concerns

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Transgendered Concerns
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Affirmation

**Oklahoma pastor to leave
Congregation won't lose their pastor**

The Rev. Leslie Penrose, pastor of Community of Hope UMC in Tulsa, was one of the "in absentia" celebrants of the covenant service for Ellie Charlton and Jeanne Barnett held in mid-January in Sacramento, California. A lay member in Oklahoma initiated the process of charges against her for that action. The public TV station in Tulsa, in reporting the story, asked her for names of people to interview about covenant services she had celebrated locally. She refused, citing confidentiality of the participants. However, an unassuming older lesbian couple offered to share the video of their celebration with the station. When Leslie learned that the tape would be shown on March 4, she decided that day to leave the denomination. She will seek orders in another denomination.

As is usual for the congregation, which worships on Sunday evenings, the March 7 service at Community of Hope-Tulsa was a celebration. Leslie observed "surely God must have a sense of humor" and that one of the greatest celebrations in a couple's lives shouldn't have to be censored or get permission from the participants.

About a dozen UMC pastors were present, in the congregation of over 100. Leslie talked about dancing: Learning country and western dancing at a local gay bar - dancing with a partner that may be awkward at first as the steps have to be practiced, then later much easier as the steps flow; dancing with the UMC six years ago to form the congregation as a mission outreach, the mutuality between Community of Hope and the denomination flowing well for about three years. She spoke of the diminishing of that dance as the literal applications from the 1996 Discipline began to be carried out, to the point where a break became the best decision for her.

Leslie celebrated the courage of the couple who shared the tape with the TV station.

UMC clergy and laity present were recognized and encouraged. One clergy member declared involvement with the congregation that evening, and came out to those assembled.

See Penrose, page 14

Dell trial set

The church trial of the Rev. Greg Dell will begin March 25 at First UMC in Downers Grove, IL [near Chicago]. Rev. Dell has been charged with "disobedience to the Order and Discipline of the UMC" because he officiated at a union ceremony for two gay men last September.

The charges were brought against Rev. Dell by Northern Illinois Bishop C. Joseph Sprague. Retired Bishop Jack Tuell was assigned to be the trial judge. Tuell, now living in the state of Washington, has been trained in administering this responsibility.

The trial was called for by a standing committee that operates much like a grand jury in civil courts in the United States. This committee met twice to review whether there was enough evidence to proceed with a trial.

Rev. Stephen Williams has been appointed by Sprague as the church counsel. Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens will serve as defense counsel. The Northern Illinois Cabinet selects a jury pool of 36 elders from its Conference. The two counsels, who can each reject up to four jurors, select the trial jury of 13. The trial will be open to the public and is expected to last about three days. Nine votes are needed for a conviction. If Rev. Dell is found guilty, the jury determines the penalty. The most severe would be removal of Rev. Dell's ministerial orders.

Dell is the second minister to be charged and brought to trial on the 1996 statement added to the Social Principles stating: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." The difference between the two trials is that in the first [the trial of Rev. Jimmy Creech] was whether this prohibition was "intended to be instructive and persuasive," but not lawfully binding. Rev. Creech was acquitted, some believe, because the necessary number of jurors were not convinced the rule had the force of law. After the acquittal, the Judicial Council, equivalent to the Supreme Court, ruled that added sentence does have such force even though it is in the Social Principles section.

Dell welcomes the trial. He calls it "unfair to the thousands of people on all sides of this controversial issue to continue debating it in the abstract... The love that God offers is

See Dell, page 14

Mission Statement

Affirmation is an activist caucus of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered people organized to speak for ourselves.

Together we:

proclaim a gospel of respect, love and justice;

relentlessly pursue policies and processes that support full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people in all areas and levels of The United Methodist Church;

overcome the barriers that diminish our common humanity by excluding or judging people because of their race, gender, class or physical abilities;

empower people to undertake works of inclusion and justice where they are.

Affirmation Newsletter

is a quarterly publication. The official views of Affirmation are stated by the Co-Spokespersons. Opinions offered in signed columns, letters and articles are those of the writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

To save space in this newsletter:
United Methodist Church = UMC
United Methodist = UM
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered = LGBT

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Information

All Affirmation correspondence are mailed discretely.

All contributions to National Affirmation are tax deductible.

Holy Union in Sacramento

One hundred sixty-seven clergy co-officiated as Jeanne Barnett and Ellie Charleton, longtime partners and Affirmation members, celebrated their relationship with a covenant service on January 16. Several months ago, Rev. Don Fado, Jeanne and Ellie's pastor at St. Mark's UMC in Sacramento, suggested in a sermon the idea of mass ecclesiastical disobedience following last summer's Judicial Council ruling that bans covenant services now to be considered church law. Jeanne and Ellie responded because they felt it would be an appropriate way to celebrate their relationship.

"O God, our Maker, we gladly proclaim to the world that Jeanne and Ellie are loving partners together for life. Amen." These words, spoken by the 120 clergy actually present at the service and by others participating in absentia*, affirmed Ellie and Jeanne's holy union. "This service was not a marriage," Ellie explained to reporters after the union, "We do not have the rights that are given to married couples." [*The officiators included 90 UM clergy from California-Nevada Conference who were joined by 13 clergy from other denominations, plus 58 UM clergy from other annual conferences, some of whom participated in absentia, and 6 former clergy who had surrendered their orders due to their sexual orientation.]

The officiating clergy have created a challenge to the UMC's 1996 statement which was added to the Social Principles that says: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." The Social Principles are "intended to be instructive and persuasive," but not lawfully binding. The Judicial Council [equivalent to the U.S. Supreme Court], ruled that the added sentence is lawful even though it is in the section on Social Principles. Rev. Don Fado said, "In our church, unfortunately, I'm allowed to come into their home and bless their house, bless their car, bless their tractor, and even bless their dog. But I am not allowed to bless them." Fado believes that the Bible supports celebration of relationships between gay and lesbian couples. "My understanding of Jesus," he told a reporter in northern California, is that he "would reach out to all people."

Longtime Affirmation member and lay member of Bethany UMC in San Francisco, Randy Miller, gave the Witness to the Word -- 1 John 4:13-5:4. Miller said that lesbians and gay men have been asked to leave the UMC. He answered that three generations of his family have been in the UMC. That legislation against lesbians and gay men has been here for only 25 years. This issue is still new to the ancient history of the UMC. This is only just beginning. Miller also criticized the church's lip service while legislating against people. "We have crossed a line that we have to resist. We can bless war, but cannot bless the loving relationships of people. That's a problem!" said Miller. "There is even a petition at the next General Conference that gays and lesbians can't be United Methodists. Such thinking says that LGBT persons are not good enough. This thinking stops here. It stops today. We need a church that will stand up and say -- whoever you are -- you are a child of God! That's why we're here today."

The location of the service was moved many times because a larger space was needed to hold all the guests. Eventually, the Sacramento Community Theater was reserved for the service and held the 1,200 plus guests. Outside of the theater a human chain surrounded the building -- "A Circle of Love." Rev. Fred Phelps and his Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, KS [almost all Phelps' family members] picketed and made their usual proclamation that "God hates fags" [the least offensive of their banners]. Their notoriety is based not only on the profanity of their message but on a long history of similar appearances -- one of the most recent of which was at the funeral of Matthew Shepard. The city of Sacramento required a deposit and fee for police and other city services due to the enormous amount of people. Jeanne and Ellie put up their own funds to cover these expenses. Donations to help cover the cost of the event would be most welcome. If you are able to help, please send your check to Affirmation, PO Box 1021, Evanston, IL 60204 and designate in the memo section, "Sacramento Celebration."

"The service was more than a celebration," noted one of the guests, "It was empowering. The Holy Spirit was most felt through Ellie and Jeanne's love, and the love of their family and friends."

A service of celebration on video The Holy Union of Jeanne Barnett and Ellie Charlton

On January 16, 1999 at the Sacramento Community Theater, a very special event occurred -- the holy union of Jeanne Barnett and Ellie Charlton. This event was attended by approximately 1,300 dedicated individuals who were there to witness the momentous occasion. Media In Motion is proud to offer this event for view on video tape.

The proceeds from the video will be donated to Shalom Ministries in Portland, Oregon and "Heresy, Religion and Relationships" a video exploring and addressing the issues between religion and relationships; particularly homosexuality. Few issues divide our society more dangerously today than does the question of homosexuality and the conflict between religion, tradition and the individual rights of LGBT people. This exciting video series is designed to allow the viewer to make knowledgeable decisions on their future based on the facts.

The video is \$29.00 plus \$4.00 for shipping and handling [first tape shipping and handling], additional tapes shipping and handling is 95 cents [multiply total tapes minus one by 95 cents].

To order send information of name, mailing address, and phone number along with a check or money order payable to:

Media in Motion
5730 N. First St.
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Allow 2-4 weeks for delivery.

Emotional abuse in the church

Recently a friend challenged me for using a "hateful" approach toward others when I wrote: "Heterosexism is a sin." I disagree. She said that if people read that who believe that homosexuality is a sin they will feel hated. Her point is that the words we use can provoke, irritate, and anger. Our challenge is to know when we must speak truth without cloaking it, when we must defy injustice, and how to live with the attacks and blame that follow.

The bold holy unions conducted by Greg Dell in Chicago and 167 clergy in Sacramento have inspired vitriolic rhetoric in the "privacy" of internet lists and chat rooms. Supporters of the services have been lambasted with everything from cartoons of pigs to name-calling and throwing biblical verses around like poison darts. They are accused of being divisive, of trying to force the issue, of taking steps to split the church. They say that people who violate church law should leave.

Some amazing dynamics are at work. Nonviolent direct action [in this case, performing services blessing same-gender couples] has shifted power. As long as the church's discrimination limited the rights of lesbian women and gay men, real change in the church moved into the arena of the local church rather than the General Conference.

When the 1996 General Conference and subsequent Judicial Council decisions impinged on the rights of pastors, pastors began resisting. Pastors may be engaging in ecclesiastical disobedience because they care about being in ministry with their flock, but they also have a deep investment in protecting their freedom of conscience and call in the practice of ministry. The 1996 ban on "homosexual unions" attacked a fundamental principle of clerical autonomy, adding many allies to the cause of gay and lesbian rights. Allies join us in testifying to pain, suffering, discrimination and exclusion that LGBT persons continue to experience.

The allied movement confronts the church's two-tiered theology [that some church members deserve blessings that others are denied] openly. This boldness angers people whose influence declines, and some react by blaming. There is plenty to go around. Some say the trouble-makers are those who don't follow the Discipline, those who don't administer the Discipline, and those who want to change the Discipline. If they don't like it, they can leave it. This makes for a church where those who agree can stay and those who differ must leave.

We are witnessing forms of emotional abuse that attack and blame the minority for not staying in their place. We do well to name it and to ask friends and allies to call it by name and deter those who use it.

Alice G. Knotts

Notice on Corporate Meeting

Affirmation's Annual Corporate Meeting will be held Saturday April 17, 2 p.m., at Foundry UMC, 1500 16th St., NW, Washington, DC
Items for consideration are:

- election of council members
- change of Articles of Incorporation
- any other item of concern for the corporation.

[Also see **Bylaw Changes** on page 13]

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One woman in New York

One woman in Texas

Affirmation National Council

One woman in
Pennsylvania

General Conference: The Road to Cleveland

It was a clear May day in Denver three years ago. Only hours earlier the General Conference voted to maintain its exclusionary policies towards queer people and their families within the UMC. The conservatives had won another victory and supposedly the queer people had lost again. But as the delegates began to wander back to the convention center another message was made clear: Queer people will not go away!

Every door to the convention center was held open by queer people and their supporters. In spite of the vote to keep us out, queer people and their allies were embodying God's command of hospitality. Many hearts were changed that day.

Every four years the General Conference gathers. It is the only body that can speak in the name of The UMC. And it has only as recently as 1972 that the UMC first began to view homosexuality negatively. Since then, as the intensity of the debate has grown, the policies that persecute queer Christians within the church have increased while the margins by which they have passed the General Conference have narrowed. The church has become more hostile, but at the same time many hearts have been changed along the way.

Never before has there been as large a host of supporters. But never before have we felt as strong of a backlash as we are currently. The issue of acceptance of queer people has become the single most contested issue within our denomination. The ministry that our local congregations offer to queers has been challenged on all sides.

A year from now the General Conference will meet again, in what is likely to be the most explosive meeting the church has ever seen. And again Affirmation needs to be there. We need to be there to give voice to our concerns. We need to be there to witness to the delegates about the exclusion, hatred, and violence perpetrated against us by our church. It takes our voices to testify to the church about the harm and hatred that is inflicted upon queer people, our friends and family.

Affirmation, along with our allies in Methodist Federation for Social Action and Reconciling Congregation Program, will be at the General Conference in Cleveland. We will be offering public witness and lobbying on behalf of LGBT persons. We will need to make a deep and profound impact upon the hearts and minds of those gathered. In the coming year Affirmation will ask for your gifts and talents, your prayers, and your participation in what is to be one of Christianity least Christian hours. It is up to us to make them hear us.

Affirmation and the Reconciling Congregation Convocation

Come join us in the Dallas/Fort Worth Area on July 29, 1999 for a special Affirmation day-long celebration and update. This will be the first day of the Reconciling Congregation Program Convocation which will continue from July 29-August 1, 1999. The \$35.00 fee for the pre-convocation event will include breakfast and lunch. We would love to have you stay for the entire convocation. There are additional costs for the entire Convocation. For more information on the Convocation and registration information please write:

Reconciling Congregation Program
3801 N. Keeler Ave.

Chicago, IL 60641

or call 773-736-5526

or on the web page <www.rcp.org>

We hope you will join us for this fantastic gathering of persons who are working to promote love and reconciliation in the church and world.

Valentine Book

"A terrific resource!" Affirmation's new *Valentine Book* is a guide to celebrating services of love and recommitment regardless of sexual orientation.

Sample services, poetry, songs, vows. First hand reports from people who attended the services. A sermon, theological reflection, a call to justice. Writings of Dr. William Aldridge, Rev. Leslie Penrose, Rev. Jimmy Creech, and others.

Sixty pages marvelously illustrated, spiral bound, desk-top published by Affirmation. \$10.00 postage paid. Available only from: Affirmation

PO Box 1021

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list memo for *Valentine Book*.

Complaint filed on 69 clergy

On 23 March, Bishop Melvin G. Talbert of the California-Nevada Conference announced that a complaint had been filed to his office about the 16 January holy union in Sacramento, California. At this holy union for two lesbians, 167 clergy partook in the service. The officiator included 90 UMC clergy from California-Nevada Conference who were joined by 13 clergy from other denominations, plus 58 UMC clergy from other annual conferences, some of whom participated in absentia, and 6 former clergy who had surrendered their orders due to their sexual orientation. [See *Holy Union in Sacramento* on page 2]

The complaint is about a 1996 statement added to the Social Principles stating: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches." The Judicial Council, equivalent to the Supreme Court, ruled that added sentence does have such force even though it is in the Social Principles section.

The complaint signed by the Rev. Ardith Allread, dean of the California-Nevada's cabinet, and by the Rev. David Bennett, superintendent for the district where the 16 January event was held, was presented to Bishop Talbert listing the names of 69 persons. The complaint states, "These clergy persons, who claimed their participation was an act of conscience and pastoral ministry, acted in violation of the Judicial Council ruling with regard to Paragraph 65.C of the 1996 Book of Discipline. According to the ruling, these clergy persons failed to uphold the order and discipline of the UMC."

The complaint further states: "The bishop and the cabinet, through the supervisory process as outlined in Paragraph 358.1 of the 1996 Book of Discipline, have attempted to reach resolution in the matter. Each district superintendent met with those persons who officiated at the service of holy union. Some plans for possible ways to achieve resolution were lifted up. None of the plans were acceptable to the persons listed in this complaint. Therefore, resolution was not achieved."

The two district superintendents conclude the complaint, stating, "...despite our theological and pastoral disagreement with this area of church law, a complaint of disobedience to the order and discipline of the UMC [Paragraph 2624.1(e) of the 1996 Book of Discipline] is filed against the following clergy..." The complaint then listed the names of the 69 clergy.

In a statement, made by Bishop Talbert, about the Judicial Council's ruling: "When this ruling was released, I expressed my sorrow and disappointment with it. However, as a bishop of the church, I stated that I would abide by the decision and uphold it, even though I disagreed with it." He called the ruling unjust, and would "not be silenced." He continued, "I will continue speaking out against the law and will continue working to change the position of our church to be more in keeping with the teachings and compassion of Jesus."

Talbert also said "Clergy are called on to do many things. They baptize children and adults. They bless homes, instruments, cars, parks, fowls, animals, buildings and various type events. In all such occasions, clergy persons are free to choose whether they will or will not perform such services. Yet when it comes to this one event of a holy union, it is prohibited. This is unconscionable! I contend that all clergy must be free to choose the appropriate pastoral responses they should make in the priestly roles. This must never become a political action. Today, it is homosexuality. What will be next issue be? Do you remember when the issue was race?

"Thus, the debate continues in society and in our churches. There are honorable people on both sides of this issue, which could split our church. In the face of such controversy, there is need for tolerance. I believe this is such a time when honorable Christians can agree to disagree, without allowing such an issue to separate us from God's table. The gospel of Jesus Christ reminds me that all sinners are invited to God's table. That being true, who, other than God, can decide to exclude some? Therefore, I refuse to treat as enemies those who chose to violate this church law -- as an act of conscience. They are not our enemies. They are our sisters and brothers in Christ, in the same way that those are who hold opposing views. Biblical and theological debates are appropriate. But there comes a time when God's call to love must take precedence over any political or theological action or decision. I believe that is the case now with this issue. I will continue proclaiming that we all belong to God, and that we will have a space at God's table. Praise God!"

The names of the accused in the complaint are: John J. Auer, III, Brandon Austin, Donald L. Baldwin, Claire Beals-Nesmith, Robert W. Blaney, Diana Marie Bohn, Richard E. Bruner, Carol M. Carter, George Carter, Jerry Carter, John Chamberlin, Thomas Clark, Rolfe Conrad, Clifford Crummey, Donna Morrow DeCamp, Sharon Delgado, Nadine DeWitt, Steven Eatough-Smith, Janet S. Everhart, Renae Extrum-Fernandez, Donald Fado, David Franks, Glenn Fuller, Nobuaki Hanaoka, J. Richard Hart, Robert J. Hawthorne, Douglas Hayward, Thomas Hicks, Bruce Hilton, Virginia Hilton, Elbert Hoffman, Hubert L. Ivery, Alan H. Jones, Linda Kelly, Phillip Lawson, Stephen Lee, Charles Lerrigo, James Lockwood-Stewart, David MacMurdo, Theresa Mason, Victor W. McLane, Maggie McNaught, Douglas Monroe, Bob Moon, Mike Morizono, Mary Parker-Eves, Larry Patten, Ted Pecot, Cheri Pierre, Jay Pierce, Kathleen Ralston, Robert Rankin, Lynn Rhodes, Byron Roberts, Ellen Rowan, Robert Sanford, Doug Smith, Marlene Spilman, Judith Stone, Frank H. Stone, Gerald Summers, Paul Sweet, Margo Tenold, Harold A. Tillinghast, Richard Whitmore, Cecil Williams, Lee Williamson, Andrea Meek Winchester, Sargent Wright.

Religion, race and sexuality

Come with me if you will. I'll take you on a short journey of being black, female, and oh yes -- a lesbian.

Born the youngest of five. My father a Coal Miner; my mother a Cleaning Lady. My mother was born and raised in the South; my father in the North.

Religion didn't matter much to my father. My mother on the other hand was raised Southern Baptist. And so that is how she raised her children.

Sexuality meant a man and woman. There were never to be any deviations. That is how God intended it to be, so it shall be.

Growing up, I recall comments like only white people do those funny things like being gay. No black child would grow up that way. We don't raise our children like those white folks do. The one comment that has stayed with me is this: No black person in their right mind would be so weak as to choose to be gay. Black folks have already proven how strong we are, just look at our history, and our women, please sisters are strong, and intelligent, they know better than to do some mess like being gay.

At age nine, I realized I was different. I realized I liked girls. When I was 17, my father died. Confused and hurt from this loss and this strange attraction to women, I turned to drugs and alcohol to ease the pain. I kept telling myself I could never be weak; I could never be gay. I'm black, this is what white folks do, we don't. So I dated men to please my mother, society, and God. For years I lived in the closet. I asked myself why was I choosing to be gay. I had to be strong for mommy; it's how she raised me to be. When I was 24, my mother was diagnosed with cancer. It would take a year before she went home to God.

After my mother's death, I felt something I never dreamed of feeling. I felt the closet door open. For years I thought that if I told my mother that I was gay, it would certainly kill her. Cancer had beaten me to it. Although the closet door opened, I stayed for six more years. I could not think of being outcast from my race, my family, friends, and co-workers. Then it happened: against my will my manager outed me. I had a choice, I could continue to lie about my sexuality or I could tell the truth. I choose the latter. I should thank her one of these days.

Let's go back to religion. Afraid and lonely I turned to God. It was October of 95. I stood in a chapel, and had a heart to heart chat with God. It was then that I found peace, love, a sense of belonging and purpose.

It was then that I realized I am a creation of God. I have not chosen to be gay, I have been created gay. Trust me, if this was a choice I would not have made it. Being black and female would have been plenty.

I am who I am. I will do my best to do God's will. I will walk in love, peace, and understanding. I will be a strong black lesbian while I run this race called life. And when I'm called home to the place that has been prepared for me, I will give all Praise and Glory to God who created me just the way I am.

Fran Dennis

reprinted from the newsletter of Prism Ministries: An Affirmative, Ecumenical Ministry to the LGBT Community of East Central Ohio

Affirmation via CORNET

Affirmation now has an e-mail list open to members only by invitation. Discussion on this list is on issues relating to LGBT concerns within the UMC.

The environment on this list is one of open and spiritual sharing between UM sexual minorities and their allies. This is a safe space; it is a private list.

If you would like to be considered to join this list, please e-mail a brief introduction of yourself and your e-mail address to:

[<umaffirmation@yahoo.com>](mailto:umaffirmation@yahoo.com)

Seeking new life forms

Affirmation is seeking out new people to serve on its National Council. This volunteer body oversees the day-to-day operations of the organization. It adopts the annual budget, sets policies, implements programs, publishes the newsletter, and fund raises for the organization. We have special need for people with experience and skill in fund raising, writing, finances, information technology, and ministry. We are seeking persons whose skill and vision might be utilized by Affirmation as we advance the vital concerns of LGBT persons within the UMC. If you, or someone you know is interested, please contact Affirmation

O God, in your love

Tune: "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

O God, in your love, you have made us unique:
In gifts and traditions, in service we seek,
In race and in culture and family design--
Diverse are the branches in Jesus the Vine.

Lord Jesus, you came to bring God's love on earth;
You welcomed the outcasts and showed us our worth.
You reached out to people whom others despised--
You said all are precious in God's loving eyes.

O Christ, with your welcome your church feels unease:
At closed doors we stand tightly holding the keys.
Yet this is your body, the church that you love--
O Lord, do you weep for your church from above?

So help your church welcome in loving accord
All people who want to serve Jesus our Lord.
O Spirit, unite us in Jesus the Son--
In mission and ministry, God, make us one.

John 15:5; Luke 15; Matthew 7:7-11; I Corinthians 12:12-26; John 17:21-22 /Text: Copyright (c) 1998

Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

The Church and Anti-gay Violence

The author invites reaction to the following analysis.

In early March the murder of Billy Jack Gaither was the second anti-gay killing in six months to gain national attention. Unfortunately it was just one of dozens of acts of anti-gay violence documented in newspaper accounts during the period. As happens in many such cases, one of the confessed murderers says they killed Gaither because of a sexual advance. However, the February 19 crime was no quick angry response to an unwelcome proposition. The killers admitted they had been planning the attack for two weeks before the fatal night. They enticed Gaither to leave a Sylacauga, Alabama bar with them, stuffed him into the trunk of his own car, took him to a deserted land reserve, beat him to death with an axe handle, and set his body afire. The virulence of the act and the attempted destruction of the body are typical of hate crimes.

Ironically, those who call for a literal interpretation and strict adherence to some Biblical passages seem less troubled by violent language and acts than by the possibility of loving relationships between people of the same gender. The fury of right wing UM is now at the February issue of *Response* magazine [published by UM Women], which focuses on hate crimes. Joyce Sohl, who is staff leader of the Women's Division, cited in her column the soul-searching questions of North Dakota Bishop Michael Coyner about whether the UM debate on homosexuality has the effect of encouraging violence against LGBT people.

In a public letter to elected directors of the Women's Division, L. Faye Short, president of the RENEW Network [the women's organization of Good News], complains that Bishop Coyner's remarks "...raise suspicion about our church's claim that homosexual practice is 'incompatible with Christian teaching.'" Ms. Short is shocked by what she calls "the illogical and erroneous leap... from legitimate hate crime concerns to accusations that many Christian organizations, and, yes, even churches, are instigators of hate and hate crimes." Apparently she has not heard about the Rev. Fred "God-hates-fags" Phelps.

Ms. Short and other leaders of the "Christian" right understandably want to distance themselves from brutal crimes like the murders of Matthew Shephard and Billy Jack Gaither. However, no amount of denial can obscure the link between hateful rhetoric and hate-filled brutality. Ms. Short says it was wrong for *Response* to depict groups such as Focus on the Family as perpetrators of anti-gay violence. However, these groups are part of a nationally coordinated effort to deny LGBT people the civil and human rights that the UM Discipline says should be protected. Two years ago, for example, they supported a "get out the Christian vote" effort that succeeded in repealing human rights protection for LGBT people in the state of Maine. They also can be counted on to oppose special laws addressing hate crimes. The impact of these groups' rhetoric is demonstrated by dramatic increases in anti-gay violence tracked in Colorado and Oregon by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs during debates over civil rights laws in those states.

Furthermore, it is a very short distance from declaring our love "incompatible with Christian teaching" to sending a message that condones brutality. As Mag Segrest points out in the *Response* article "Contemplating Matthew Shephard," the UMC and other denominations underline the point whenever "...they put the question of human community up for a denominational vote."

In their approval of Focus on the Family et al, the leadership of UM's right wing wants to take the same approach to the Discipline that they do to the Bible - literal interpretation of the parts that support their prejudice while they ignore the message as a whole.

The people of Sylacauga, AL are fortunate to have another type of UM leader. "No flaming liberal, the Rev. Hughey Reynolds, pastor of First Church, made it clear in his March 7 sermon that he supports the official UM stance. He also addressed what he called "the spiritual issue behind the heinous crime committed in our area by people from this our town against one of our own neighbors." He acknowledged press reports that "attributed the hate behind this senseless killing to the pulpits of our area which issue anti-gay judgments and stir the fears of Christian people which cause us to further isolate anyone we suspect to be homosexual." He added: "And I pray to God now that I do not occupy one of those pulpits responsible for stirring fears which kindle hatred of those who are gay."

Moreover, referring to the Gospel story of the Samaritan woman at the well [John 4], Reynolds encourages his congregation to "Start inside looking honestly at yourself and you will find a place, which is also your place of healing, where you are much less likely to cast judgment against your neighbor... And really it is in your own healing and mine that you and I find a right relationship with others and can lead them to Christ."

Participating in the March 9 memorial service for Gaither, the Rev. Lawton Higgs Sr. of United Methodist Church of the Reconciler, Birmingham said, "We're here to celebrate this evening that God is not hate, but God is love."

They are a marked contrast to those who excoriate UM Women for inviting the church to consider Bishop Coyner's concern.

Birmingham Area Bishop Robert Fannin has yet to respond to Affirmation's inquiry about his response to the Gaither killing. However, he and his colleagues in the Council of Bishops still have the opportunity to reclaim the proper role of the UMC in this issue. They can remind state and federal legislators, in the words of a New York Times editorial, that: "Governments need to say, because citizens need to know" that it is wrong to attack people "just because of who they are." They can remind the people in their communities that the UM Book of Discipline has not yet set aside the biblical mandate against murder.

The author invites reaction to the following analysis.

Morris L. Floyd

Views

The official views of Affirmation are stated by the Co-Spokespersons. Opinions offered in signed columns, letters and articles are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation. We welcome those with opposing views to write.

Bashing Jerry Falwell is harmful to our cause

A Soulforce response to the Tinky Winky War

For the past few days, we've been buried under an avalanche of articles and press releases bashing Jerry Falwell for "outing Tinky Winky."

After rushing to condemn him in colorful and indignant sound bites, we learn that Mr. Falwell didn't "out" Tinky at all. J. M. Smith, Senior Editor of Jerry's National Liberty Journal, wrote the column that launched a million quips. Before our surprise attack, Jerry had never seen an episode of the Teletubbies, let alone denounced them.

If anyone outed this cute little character [who is purple, wears a triangular antenna on his head, and carries a purse] it was our own Washington Blade. Mr. Smith quoted an April 17, 1998, Blade article as the source of his column in Falwell's newsletter. The Blade article suggests that Tinky provides "a great message to kids - not only that it's OK to be gay, but the importance of being well-accessorized." Mr. Smith was simply alerting parents to that claim.

Like the Blade author, I cheer every lesbian or gay character that "comes out" on television, even the fuzzy, uncertain kind. I'm hoping that any day now, loveable, all-purple Barney will turn to the camera and whisper to his vast children's audience, "I'm gay." Our granddaughter Katie will call her two gay granddads with the good news. Like you, I find it absurd, hilarious, and even tragic that anyone would see Tinky Winky, Barney or Big Bird as a threat to the development of a young child's sexual orientation.

But what do we achieve by bashing those, like Jerry, who disagree?

We are called by Jewish and Christian prophets, "to love our enemy." Out-loving our enemy is the only way we can prove to Jerry that he is wrong about us, that we have chosen the higher moral ground, that we are God's children, too. Bashing Jerry only hurts us. I know from experience. I spent three years bashing Falwell, Robertson, Dobson and the others. I got lots of attention, but I did very little to help our cause and nothing to change the minds and hearts of those who fear us.

Then I discovered the "soul force" principles of relentless nonviolence as taught by Gandhi and King. Both men make it clear. Our ultimate goal is NOT to triumph over Mr. Falwell, let alone to embarrass or silence him. Our long-range goal is to reconcile with Jerry, to create, in Dr. King's words, "the beloved community" where we can live as neighbors with Jerry and his family.

Dr. King would also remind us that Jerry Falwell is our brother, a child of the same Creator. Jerry is not evil, stupid nor insane. He is a member of our human family who is a victim of the same misinformation that once kept us in our

closets. Our job is not to humiliate him but to bring him truth, in love, relentlessly until he, too, is set free.

Instead, we bashed him just like he bashes us. And in the process, we lost the battle. The man whose image and ideals we try regularly to laugh away, ended up the winner again, interviewed by practically every newspaper and television program in the country. Our bashing helped Jerry regain his old role as the most visible spokesman for the fundamentalist Christian right.

"Who would have ever predicted," Jerry said today, "that the little parental warning in the February issue of the Journal would open such a world of opportunity." I'll gladly allow my name to be soiled by the secular press in order to have the occasion to share my relationship with Christ - any time!"

I know Jerry Falwell. Of course he is "slick, a "media maven," a "genius at using the anti-homosexual rhetoric to raise money and mobilize volunteers," but he is not a phony. Right or wrong the man is sincerely committed to defeating "the gay agenda" and to "saving homosexuals from their sickness and their sin."

Our ridicule, our clever sound bites, our anti-Jerry campaigns do NOT phase him, let alone persuade him of the justice in our cause. He enjoys every minute of the conflict. We will not stop his flood of anti-homosexual misinformation by bashing him. Our one day marches, rallies, and demonstrations won't do it either. In fact, what Frederick Clarkson calls "the politics of gesture" play directly into our adversary's hands giving them photos on the evening news and in the morning papers that [falsely] support Jerry's claims and his listener's fears.

And the flood of hate mail that Jerry has received in the last few days from our side only convinces him of the "danger we pose to the nation's values." Inundated with hateful, profane, and threatening e-mail, phone calls, and faxes, one of Jerry's staff said "gays can cuss out an individual in far more creative ways than I have ever seen."

When I was writing Jerry's autobiography [we all have pasts to be forgiven] he remembered those days when he was misusing Scripture to support segregation. "It wasn't Congress, the Courts, or the Attorney General that changed my mind," he recalled. "It was a black man who shined my shoes every Saturday. One day, he looked into my eyes and said quietly, 'When do you think I can join your church, Reverend?'" Jerry still remembers that day.

Without the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s that black man might never have spoken those words [and Jerry might never have opened his church doors]. We must continue to support our organizations that work for justice on

See Tinky Winky War, page 9

Re: Affirmation Logo

I would favor retaining "what's left" of the logo as it is. The cross and triangle convey succinctly the meeting of Church with issues of sexual orientation. Both are easily identifiable, easily reproducible, etc., which is important for logos. But mainly, the absence of the flame encourages us to keep working until this cause is so embraced by the denomination, that we can once again use the cross and flame emblem as a sign of our status as an Official group [or office] within the denomination.

Rev. C.W

Tinky Winky War

from page 8

our behalf with the President, the Congress, and the Courts. We must continue to support our state and local activists who fight the grass roots battles against the anti-gay initiatives. But they have their hands full putting out the fires. Someone must take on the arsonists.

Without meaning anyone harm, Pastor Jerry has become one of the six or seven primary sources of misinformation about God's gay and lesbian children. He doesn't understand let alone believe that his false and inflammatory rhetoric leads [directly and indirectly] to discrimination, suffering, and death. I'm sure that Jerry would condemn those who killed Matthew Shepard or carved "fag" into Adam Colton's chest. We must help him understand that unintentionally his toxic, anti-homosexual rhetoric pollutes the national discourse and helps give license to those crimes.

I appeal to the 22,000 members of Jerry's Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg. At least 1,000 of you are gay or lesbian, or have gay or lesbian children. Come out. Share your story with your pastor. It may cost you, but it will also set you free.

I appeal to the gay and lesbian students among the 14,000 young people enrolled at Jerry's Liberty University. Can you imagine the difference you could make if your story moved Jerry even a little closer to the truth?

I appeal to the 26,000 Liberty graduates who have received your diploma from Jerry's hand. How long will you wait before telling him the truth as you know it? ACT-UP reminds us that "Silence equals death."

And I appeal to you. You may not know Jerry, but you could still write him in the nonviolent spirit of "soul force." He's on the net at <Jerry@Falwell.com> Or you can send him a card or letter at Thomas Road Baptist Church, 701 Thomas Road, Lynchburg, VA 24502. Apologize for the hate he's experienced from our community. Share your own story with him. Answer one of his specific UNTRUTHS about homosexuality and homosexuals with TRUTH. Pray for Jerry. And if you've stopped praying, try to imagine Jerry as God sees him, a sincere man who is doing great wrong. Ask your Creator to help you love Jerry and see where that love leads.

In the 28 years of activism since Stonewall much good has been done, many victories won, but we haven't yet changed the minds or hearts of Falwell, Robertson, Dobson, Kennedy or the others. No wonder. We haven't really tried. We've ridiculed and reviled them never realizing that hating them is violence of the heart and bashing them is violence of the tongue and pen. Let's try the ways of nonviolence.

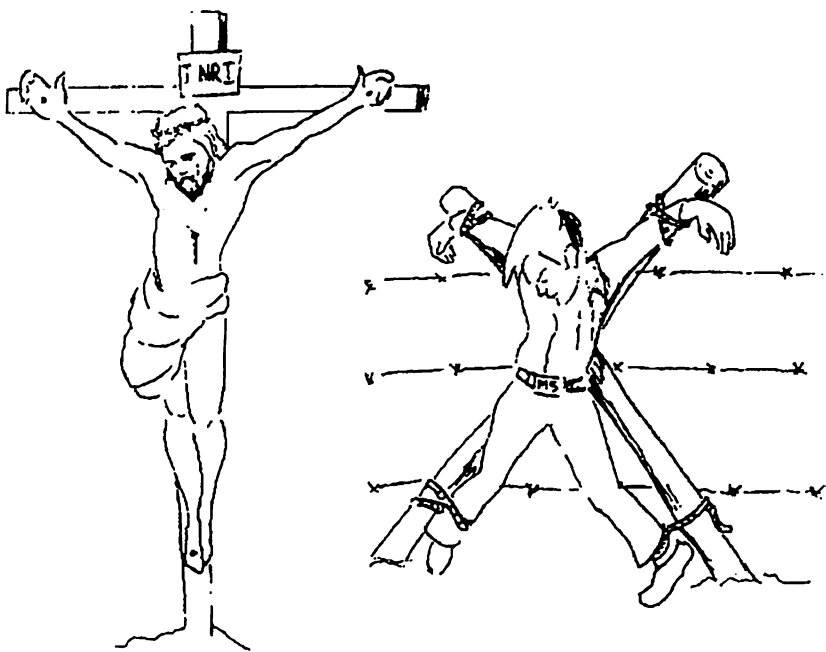
Our civil rights movement will not succeed unless our adversaries see us as men and women of integrity. Let's take the high moral ground. Let's stop bashing our enemies. Let's show them by our relentless, loving commitment to TRUTH that we are God's children, too. Let's start responding to them with "soul force."

And if they continue refusing to hear us, if they continue to ignore the evidence, then we'll have to go the next step. That next step requires, in Gandhi's words, "voluntary, redemptive suffering." Remember in India the 245-mile march to the sea to make salt and the marchers clubbed senseless at the salt works? Remember in Birmingham the black children facing fire hoses, clubs, and police dogs? What will it take from us of "voluntary, redemptive suffering" to change the minds and hearts of the nation? We are making plans to that end. Will you join us?

*Mel White
February 18, 1999*

They were killed because of who they were!!

drawing by Mike Dennehy, Elder of the Presbyterian Church. Dennehy writes: "The major religions condemn homosexuality as unnatural, prohibit practicing gays from being members of the clergy, and denounce their efforts to marry or adopt children. The 'christian right' has an ongoing campaign to 'de-program' gays. Others are boycotting a play they find to be 'horribly offensive' because it portrays a gay Jesus. Despite these actions, they insist they are not fanning the flames of homophobia or laying the groundwork for atrocities as occurred in Wyoming. Ironically and poignantly, the victim, Matthew Shepard, faced a crucifixion-like death: bludgeoned, bound to a fence a fence post, and left to die."



**THEY WERE KILLED BECAUSE OF WHO
THEY WERE!!**

Grieving for the UMC

I am grieving for the UMC. The declaratory ruling of the Judicial Council gives legal, coercive force to the Social Principle prohibiting "homosexual unions," requiring pastors to discriminate against and contribute to the persecution of gay men and lesbians. The Church of John Wesley, founded upon principles of social justice and piety, will now be prosecuting pastors for praying God's blessing upon same-gender couples who make covenants of love and fidelity.

It is a sad day for the UMC. Our witness to the grace of God has been compromised by bigotry and fear. The Church has circumscribed itself into a closed, exclusive community that is in conflict with Jesus' vision of the realm of God where all are welcome, included and accepted. The Church is relying upon prejudice, ignorance, and fear, instead of allowing grace and the Holy Spirit to lead us into this vision. The true nature of the Church has been denied.

This decision contributes to the Church's long-standing assault upon lesbians and gay men, as well as upon their families and friends and the churches that seek to be welcoming, inclusive, and supportive. It is an act of institutional violence and cannot be tolerated.

I appeal to UM pastors to protest this decision through ecclesial disobedience by defying the prohibition and publicly celebrating same-gender covenants. The leadership of The UMC must then decide whether or not it will devote its energy and resources to prosecuting pastors who seek to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ by providing pastoral and liturgical support to gay and lesbian person. It will have to decide whether the enforcement of prejudice is of more importance than witnessing to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

I also appeal to laity and clergy of the UMC who disagree with the anti-gay language in The Book of Discipline to begin organizing to change it at the 2000 General Conference. We can no longer allow fear and prejudice to define who we are and how we behave as UM. We can wait no longer. It is time to end the bigotry and stop the persecution.

Name withheld upon request

View from the Editor

Finding the truth

Are not the words "incompatible with Christian teaching" the same as un-Christian?

Pete Seeger, folk singer, writer, and banjo player, will be turning 80 years old this year.

From testimony before the Committee on Un-American Activities, 18 August 1955, U.S. House of Representatives.

Mr. Tavenner: The committee has information obtained in part from the *Daily Worker* indicating that over a period of time, especially since December of 1945, you took part in numerous entertainment features...

Mr. Seeger: Sir, I refuse to answer that question whether it is a quote from *The New York Times* or the *Vegetarian Journal*... I am not going to answer any questions as to my associations, my philosophical or religious beliefs or my political beliefs, or how I voted in any election or any of these private affairs. I think these are very improper questions for any American to be asked, especially under such compulsion as this. I would be very glad to tell you my life if you want to hear of it.

Chairman Walter: What is your answer?

Mr. Seeger: I will tell you what my answer is. I feel that in my whole life I have never done anything of any conspiratorial nature, and I resent very much and very deeply the implication of being called before this committee that in some way, because my opinions may be different from yours, or yours, Mr. Willis, or yours, Mr. Scherer, that I am any less of an American than anybody else. I love my country very deeply, sir.

Chairman Walter: Why don't you make a little contribution towards preserving its institutions?

Mr. Seeger: I feel that my whole life is a contribution, that is why I would like to tell you about it.

Chairman Walter: I don't want to hear about it.

Mr. Tavenner: I want to know whether or not you were engaged in... service to the Communist party in entertaining...

Mr. Seeger: I have sung for Americans of every political persuasion, and I am proud that I never refuse to sing to an audience, no matter what religion or color of their skin, or situation of life. I have sung in hobo jungles, and I have sung for the Rockefellers, and I am proud that I never refused to sing for anybody... because I disagreed with their political opinion, and I am proud of the fact that my songs seem to cut across and find perhaps a unifying thing, basic humanity.

Mr. Tavenner: There are various peace groups in the country which have utilized your services, are there not?

Mr. Seeger: I have sung for pacifists and I have sung for soldiers. I would be curious to know what you think of a song like this very great Negro spiritual, [sings] *I'm Gonna Lay Down My Sword and Shield, Down by the Riverside*...

Mr. Tavenner: [interrupts] That is not at all responsive to my question.

A year later Pete Seeger was cited for contempt of Congress. A year after that he was indicted. Five years later he was tried, found guilty, sentenced to one year in prison. However, he was granted bail, pending appeal. A year he later was cleared by the U.S. Court of Appeals.

Seeger reflects back on the hearing. "I feel I was too damn polite. I wish I had stood up and shouted... YOU ARE THE UNAMERICANS!"

To some this was known as "the time of hate." It was a time of fear.

Hitler got to power through legal means. His political platform against Jews and Communists is well known. However, few remember Hitler's platform was also anti-abortion and anti-homosexual. History is NOT being repeated. People repeat history.

The analogy between Pete Seeger and the House hearings on Un-American Activities seems to closely parallel what is happening between the UMC/"religious right" and the GLBT people. It will be interesting with the recent events in the UMC to see how it's history turns...

David L. Gunnell

Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation - Complex issues challenge churches' wish for simple answers

The debate in the church about sexual orientation is characterized by the understandable wish of many Christians for simple answers to complex questions. Moreover, the further to the "right" a person is on the spectrum of opinion, the more strident the demand will be for either-or solutions. Ideological commitments can eventually crowd out a willingness to look at a complete picture of human experience and apply to it a response based on a holistic understanding of the Christian Gospel. This approach denies the richness of creation and threatens the ability of Christian faith to win the hearts and minds of people increasingly aware of that richness.

Nowhere is this problem more evident than in the area of human sexuality, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Much of our discussion in the United Methodist Church over the last several decades has been driven by the presumption that both gender and orientation neatly fall into two categories: male/female and straight/gay. Indeed, lesbians and gay men have themselves been slow both to acknowledge the experience of those affectionally and sexually attracted toward both women and men and to understand the reality of transgendered persons.

The challenge comes into sharp relief in the light of emerging science on the phenomenon of intersexuality. Cultural definitions supply meaning to the categories of male and female. Though these definitions vary somewhat from culture to culture and are not always easily articulated, most think they know what it means to "look" and "act" in one or the other of these categories. However, recent research is clarifying that there is a continuum of genetic and anatomical traits between 100% biologically male and 100% biologically female. Dr. Anne Fausto-Sterling of the Division of Biology and Medicine at Brown University estimates that from 1 percent to 4 percent infants born are intersexual, meaning that they have some degree of gender because they are not at one extreme or the other of that continuum.

Intersexualism is the result of variation from usual genetic or anatomical characteristics, or both. A 100% genetic has two gender determining chromosomes, one X chromosome and one Y, while a genetic female has two X chromosomes. However, some persons have only one such chromosome or more than two. According to researchers, moreover, all humans have the biological capacity to develop either male or female genitalia and secondary sexual characteristics while in the womb. Some babies are born with male or female chromosomal makeup and with both male and female genitalia, or with some of the genitalia of the opposite chromosomal sex. Dr. Fausto-Sterling calls those with both testes and ovaries "herms." Those with testes and some female genitalia but no ovaries are "merms." Those with ovaries and some male genitalia but no testes are "ferms." This gives the possibility of five rough biological groupings: male, merm, herm, ferm and female.

Physicians usually reassign the gender of intersexed infants at birth, sometimes without consulting or telling the parents. The anatomy is surgically altered and the baby receives hormonal treatments to enable a fit into the cultural category of male or female. The gender of assignment is usually determined not by chromosomal tests, but based on the degree to which the genitalia can eventually appear "typical." The result is perhaps millions of genetic [XY chromosomes] males with female genitalia and genetic females [XX chromosomes] and females with male genitalia. A growing community of persons who have realized their intersexed status as adults is raising questions about the appropriateness of what Dr. Fausto-Sterling refers to as a "surgical shoehorn," that forces intersexed infants into rigid cultural categories having little to do with biological reality."

There are multiple implications of intersexualism for the church. Prominent among these is the set of ethical, cultural, social and pastoral issues surrounding gender assignment at infancy. More fundamental is the additional challenge to thinking about how the church should respond to people whose gender identity or sexual orientation is at variance from the statistical norm. The relationship among intersexualism, transgenderism and sexual orientation has yet to be explored by researchers, let alone understood by theologians. However, the complexity appears just by overlaying the continuum of gender identity with the Kinsey scale of sexual orientation, which recognizes a similar spread between exclusive same sex orientation and exclusive opposite sex orientation.

The church should resist the likely cries from those who will insist on the application of traditionalist morality to this challenge. Thinking themselves kind to do so, they may want to label intersexed persons as a regrettable "mistake of nature" whose pathology should, if possible, be corrected to culturally determined norms baptized in biblical literalism. These persons' sexual expression will be said to be "incompatible with Christian teaching" unless it is in the context of one woman married to one man. But on what definition of gender will this approach rely? The literalist hermeneutic offers no guidance about whether genetic make-up or anatomy should be considered definitive.

The traditionalist formula "it's in the Bible - God said it - that settles it," therefore, will not be enough. Despite this reality, Christian right spokesperson Cal Thomas, among others, has recently [CBS News Sunday Morning, 21 March 1999] tried to recast the issue in the tired framework of science versus faith. When reporting on issues of human sexuality most news media unfortunately abet this distraction by treating pre scientific ideas as if they are of equal standing with, and therefore require "equal time" with validated information from the biology and social science.

See, Complex issues page 13

Complex issues

from page 12

If there is hope for the mainline churches to avoid a split over sexuality related issues, it may well lie in the fact that most of their members have long ago abandoned the pre scientific world view in most areas of their lives. If they hold onto it in the sexuality discussions, it is likely because that framework reinforces the prejudgments and stereotypes we have all learned. In other words, it results not nearly so much from thoughtful reflection as from emotional reaction to difference. Since the late 1970's, research has repeatedly shown that the most effective "cure" for pre judgments and stereotypes of this kind is to know someone who is gay or lesbian. The cognitive dissonance between the stereotype of the hedonistic homosexual and the reality of a well-adjusted son, daughter, parent or friend will over time often move a person from reactionary rejection toward tolerance and even affirmation.

The message for LGBT and intersexed Christians? "Come out, come out, wherever you are!"

Morris Floyd

The information on intersexualism presented above, including the quotes from Professor Fausto-Sterling, comes from *A Biological Understanding of Gender Varieties - Laws Preventing Same Sex Marriage Are Factually Flawed* by William O. Beeman, Ph.D., of the department of anthropology at Brown University. Dr. Beeman has given permission for his article to be copied and distributed in any format. An earlier version was published 17 March 1996 in *The Baltimore Sun*.

For further information see:

- *The Biology of Homosexuality and Transgendered*, article by Susan M. Menking, MD, may be available from the author at e-mail address

- Web site of the Intersex Society of North America, including information and bibliography, at <<http://www.isna.org>>

- *Myths of Gender: Biological Theories about Women and Men*, by Anne Fausto-Sterling

- *Neither Man nor Woman*, by Sereena Nanda, on third sex societies in India and around the world.

Bylaws

The following matter is on the agenda for the annual corporate meeting.

The Council recommends the following changes to the Articles of Incorporation and forwards them to the membership for review and vote. The purpose is to change our name legally and clarify our purposes to be inclusive of bisexual and transgendered persons and concerns. These changes would reflect those already made in our Bylaws. Proposed words for deletion are underlined and for addition are **boldface**.

ARTICLE ONE

The name of the corporation is AFFIRMATION: UNITED METHODISTS FOR LESBIAN/GAY **GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDERED CONCERNS**.

ARTICLE FOUR PURPOSES

The purposes for which this corporation is organized are:

(A) The specific and primary purposes are:

(1) To provide religious services, fellowship, and education to persons who are concerned about the lives of lesbians, gay-men, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons and their families.

(2) To work with the ministry of the **The** United Methodist Church at a local, regional, and national level as the **The** United Methodist Church relates to those persons concerned about the lives of lesbians, gay-men, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons and their families.

(3) To give personal and religious support to the members and constituency of the **The** United Methodist Church who are lesbians, gay-men, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons and/or who are related or concerned about the lives of lesbians and gay-men **such persons**.

[The other articles and the remainder of Article 4 would retain existing text.]

Information

I am interested in knowing more about:

☐ Becoming a member of National Affirmation and receiving the quarterly newsletter.

☐ I want to provide financial support for the work of Affirmation. Enclosed is a donation of \$_____

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

Phone_____ Annual Conference_____

E-Mail Address [please be case-specific]_____

Mail or e-mail to address on page 1

Houston Meeting

The National Affirmation Council at its last meeting on 5-7 February in Houston, TX took time to take a hard look at itself, its mission, its audience, and then take stock of who we are and who we want to be.

Council members came to grips with the fact that to do what we want to do, we first must raise funds to accomplish our goals. One of the greater goals is to seriously look at hiring a staff person to do the daily work of the Council. A committee was appointed to report on this subject at the next Council meeting, which will be in April, 1999, in Washington, DC.

At that April meeting a Leadership Development Plan will be discussed. That plan will be disseminated to Council members prior to this meeting via e-mail.

The Council went on record as being very firm in wanting to continue and to expand its working relationship with the Reconciling Congregation Program [RCP] and the Methodist Federation for Social Action [MFSA]. Representatives of all these groups have been meeting to accomplish these goals.

Council members decided to ask our membership whether or not there is a need for national gatherings of Affirmation. This was done for many years, but it has been discontinued for the last few years. This will be asked at the Affirmation time during the pre-convocation day for the RCP Convocation in July 29 - Aug. 1 in Denton, TX.

Council members heard that the number of sites celebrating Valentine '99 was down from those celebrating Valentine '98. The consensus was this was a natural course of events. Valentine '98 pointed out the injustice of the new Book of Discipline ruling spelling out a prohibition of same-gender holy unions being "conducted" by UM clergy and/or held in UMC. From that grew the momentous service in Sacramento, CA. [See **Holy Union in Sacramento**, page 2]

Now, Council members are discussing ways to we prevent the issue of holy unions over-shadowing the central issue of injustice to LGBT persons? The Council firmly holds the belief that *All People are the Valued Children of God*, and we believe the UMC is limiting who it serves, blesses and includes. We see this as a affront to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Council members also confirmed plans during General Conference 2000 in Cleveland, OH. We will again sponsor a special worship service during the General Conference. We will again share a hospitality/resource room with RCP, MFSA and Woman's Caucus, and make daily newsletters available to all conference delegates. We will also have a dinner with entertainment and awards [See **General Conference: Road to Cleveland**, page 4].

Council members will elect 5 council members.

The Council encourages its members to give input to their process of discovering our directions. Members can either write:

Affirmation

P.O. Box 1021

Evanston, IL 60204-1021

or e-mail at <umaffirmation@yahoo.com>

Penrose

from page 1

Unlike most UM congregations, Community of Hope is legally an independent entity, its building not held "in trust" for the denomination. Persons involved with the congregation are not called "members"; some have church membership elsewhere [including UMC]. Leslie was appointed there "beyond the local church." She wants to continue as their pastor, and seek clergy membership in another denomination, probably United Church of Christ.

What are the implications for the UMC? In the Oklahoma Conference there remains just one Reconciling Congregation [Epworth UMC, Oklahoma City].

We shall continue on, though without Leslie's wisdom, and with less involvement from Community of Hope participants and their energy and wisdom. The Conference has lost the best kind of troublemaker. The Conference has lost an important ministry in the Tulsa area, a place where otherwise lost sheep might find refuge while staying connected to the denomination. The majority at General Conference might say "Good riddance," but they know not what they do.

Like so many others, Leslie Penrose has had it "up to here" with a denomination that talks about pluralism and inclusion but on the issue of homosexuality now demands conformity to a hypocritical, narrow standard. Rather than spend her energy fighting the denomination, she has chosen to focus on the needs of her congregation, her family, her profession. We mourn the loss for the UMC. We give thanks to God for Leslie, her congregation, her ministry, her witness.

John Calhoun

Dell

from page 1

not theoretical. The church must decide if it truly wants to declare that its affirmation of God's embracing, celebrating acceptance is available to some but not others who want to live in faithful relationships of commitment and love." He said, "I took a vow to be in ministry with all persons, not regardless of their identity, but in celebration of their identity. I'm expected to baptize, teach, counsel, visit, bury and learn from all of the persons to whom I've been appointed to pastor. I'm also charged to bless and celebrate the relationships of love between persons when those relationships uphold standards of faithfulness and ministry. It is a privilege -- not a duty -- to do so. To withhold such blessing from some because of their identity and regardless of the quality of their relationship would be the true violation of my ordination."